

Interracial News Service

A DIGEST OF TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN HUMAN RELATIONS
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THE LOCAL CHURCH AND A STEP TOWARD MASSIVE DESEGREGATION

"Eleven O'clock on Sunday is the most segregated hour in our land."

"The churches remain the most segregated major institution in our country."

Such statements place a finger on one of the sorest spots in the American Christian conscience. Although there has been a significant increase in the number of Protestant churches which have members of more than one race, the worship of God is still conducted on an overwhelmingly segregated basis.

This factor in the life of the churches places Protestantism on the defensive. Lee Nichols and Louis Cassels, writing in the October 1955 issue of *Harpers' Magazine* under the title, "The Churches Repent", illustrate this point in their report of the conversation of two Presbyterian ministers shortly after the Supreme Court decision of 1954 on the public school desegregation cases.

"It is a great challenge to us," said one of them. "The Church must prepare the people to accept integrated schools in a Christian spirit."

His companion was silent for several moments before he answered. "I wonder," he said finally, "if there is anything convincing we can say about brotherly love and racial understanding, when the Church itself is the most segregated institution in America."

Ralph McGill, writing in the *Atlanta Constitution*, August 30, 1960, on the occasion of the "kneel-ins", stresses the fact that Christianity is "everywhere on trial". He seems to be saying that organized Christianity is on the defensive, especially in other parts of the world, because of the incidents which have occurred at home and abroad which tend to indicate support of segregated practices on the part of the churches.

Fundamentally, the fact of its ruptured fellowship has often placed the churches in a defensive posture in relation to the issue of racial justice which has been defined as basically a moral issue. What kind of image of the church does this state of affairs project? What damage is done to its mission to the world?

Part of the dilemma which faces the churches is how to free themselves from the burden of their social inheritance of segregated fellowships so that they can develop a posture more consistent with their stated beliefs, their nature and their mission.

Efforts Toward an Inclusive Fellowship

A listing of certain basic social facts regarding the social situation in which the churches have attempted to achieve racially inclusive fellowships will help in understanding why progress has been slow.

While there are no reliable statistics on the total number of Protestant churches which have members of more than one race, recent studies by denominational bodies indicate that they are increasing. It can be estimated on the basis of these most recent studies that approximately 10% of the Protestant churches have members of more than one racial group and that most of these churches are located in urban communities where people of two or more races live together. This figure is five times as large as the corresponding figure five years ago; however, it represents less than 1% of the Protestant church membership.

The National Council of Churches and most of the major Protestant denominations have accepted statements either renouncing the practice of segregation in the churches or

affirming a ministry inclusive of all people regardless of race or ethnic origin who desire to participate in a particular church. Similar courses of action have been recommended to their local churches.

During the past ten years research among the Protestant denominations has examined the racial practices in their own fellowships on a national, regional and local level. Also, this research has sought to develop ways and means of implementing their policy pronouncements on the achievement of a racially inclusive fellowship.

One of the social facts which emerged out of an attempt to implement this goal was the awareness of the relationship between residential segregation and institutional desegregation. It became clear that the development of racially inclusive fellowships was integrally related to the solution of the problem of residential desegregation. This was especially true for many Protestant churches (about 80-90 per cent) are located in either all-white or all-Negro communities.

In addition, church membership among the largest non-white minority group, the Negro-American, lay primarily in the separate Negro denominations. It is estimated that the 1960 Census will show a Negro population of about 18 million. Figures relating to the year 1955 show a total membership in Negro denominations of 10,043,552, with 95% belonging to five major denominations. There are approximately 600,000 Negro members in the predominantly white Protestant denominations. Of these, 366,000 belong in The Methodist church. In summary, about 94% of the Negro Protestant church membership belong to the historic Negro communions. Commenting on the Negro church membership, Dr. J. Oscar Lee writes, "They point to the central place that the churches have occupied and continue to occupy in the life of the Negro community. . . . Blocked as the Negro is by the pattern of racial segregation from full participation in the total life of the community, the Negro church affords him the opportunity for full participation in an organized group".* The historic conditions which produced the Negro churches still exist; however, their future as distinctly Negro institutions will in time be questioned as the process toward desegregation in society proceeds.

Another social fact is the nature of Protestant ecclesiastical structure. The democratic nature of this structure permits every local church to make its own decision as to whether it will accept or not accept a policy of inclusiveness. This is generally true whatever the particular form of church government. In short, a policy of inclusiveness has to emerge from the local church; the churches are voluntary groups who can decide who is to belong.

At this point, a number of commentators on our church life have indicated with increasing frequency that one of the factors which is helping to preserve segregation is a lack on the part of the local churches themselves — a lack in their understanding of the true nature and mission of the Church as the body of Christ. In such a community of the faithful, by its very nature, there is no place for social distinction.

Given the nature of these social facts, one must conclude that to achieve the goal of an inclusive fellowship will be

* J. Oscar Lee, "Religion Among Ethnic and Racial Minorities", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November 1960, pp. 112-124. Reprints available from the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, National Council of Churches, 10¢ each.

difficult. At the same time, on the basis of sociological analysis, the eventual reaching of this goal is linked to the speed with which American society will move toward a general solution to the problem of intergroup relations in the areas of housing, employment, voting rights, education, public accommodations and the like.

It is at this point that the churches are faced with a dilemma. They cannot wait for the eventual culmination of this process to free themselves from the burden of their social inheritance of segregation if they are to be faithful to their nature and mission in this rapidly changing world. They must act now.

One authority indicates that effective solutions to many social problems frequently depend upon locating a tangible part of the problem which is commensurate with the available resources that will enable the group to move toward a solution of that particular part of the entire problem. Frequently, the simple matter of limited human and financial resources as well as other reality limits dictates this pattern of approach. Another way of putting this is that within the context of a long range goal, appropriate short-term goals must be developed. The burden of this article is to set forth one such proximate goal.

A First Step Toward Massive Desegregation

A first step toward massive desegregation is for all local churches in a community to join together in making forthright declarations that their fellowships are open without regard to race; and that all worshippers are welcome.

Given the nature of authority in Protestantism, if the churches are going to free themselves from being "segregating" or "racially discriminating" fellowships, it becomes critical that every local church affirm the denominational policy at its own ecclesiastical level. That this remains a gap in the lives of the churches was revealed by one of the findings of a recent study made of the Congregational Christian churches. Of the 1,500 churches of the denomination located in standard metropolitan areas, 1,054 took part in the study. Almost half the local churches had no definite policy for receiving members of racial minorities. About 70 per cent indicated that they had never confronted a situation that required a policy decision in this area. Since this study was limited to standard metropolitan areas in which racial minority group population has been increasing, it seems apparent that the churches are not pressing vigorously toward a policy of inclusiveness.

This action would be relevant because the churches would be true to their own nature and mission. There are requirements of faith and belief which legitimately narrow the entrance into the fellowship of the church. These standards and requirements pertain to the religious dimension of the fellowship. Externals such as race or ethnic origin cannot be set up as requisites to the sharing of the Christian Fellowship, where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus". The constant danger confronting the churches is that the norms of secular society regarding race dictate their behavior. For all churches, a declaration that all are welcome without social distinctions is an affirmation which should flow from their basic nature and mission as the body of Christ.

Such declarations will have a greater impact if they become a part of a cooperative ecumenical effort on the part of churches in a given city to develop a total community with open churches. One authority has said that there is yet to be a single city or town in which 75 to 80 per cent of the Christian churches have clearly and unequivocally declared their fellowships open without regard to race. In addition, such declarations, if they are going to have their full impact, need to be publicized so that the total community knows where the churches stand on this issue.

Although the particular pattern of developing the process of declaring and publicizing an open fellowship may differ from community to community, it would seem that this approach would lend itself to the local council of churches taking initiative and leadership. Such an educational process with an action goal in mind could begin in a joint workshop of the churches and move to the local churches for their individual consideration.

It is important that thought and effort be given to the educational approach to be taken in this action process. It is also critical that the confrontation to affirm an open door policy

be set squarely within the framework of the faith, especially in terms of the nature and mission of the churches. In addition, it is important to help the churches and members to see how the life and the work of the church is vitiated by their failure to witness.

Is Such Action Realistic?

A number of writers in recent years have pointed to the "organizational dilemma" of the churches which makes it difficult for them to speak or witness in a prophetic fashion to critical social issues of our day. On the one hand is the Christian imperative which flows from the Gospel. On the other, the need for the institutional church to be concerned with those aspects of its organizational life which enable it to maintain itself as an institution. Therefore, any approach, to be relevant to the institutional church, must deal realistically with the situation confronting the churches. It is necessary to see the suggested approach within the following contexts:

Trend Toward Freedom. One of the major trends of our time, especially accentuated since World War II, is the worldwide movement toward freedom — the ever increasing pressure on the part of minority groups for recognition and treatment as human beings. In the United States, the Supreme Court decisions in 1954 and 1955 in the public school desegregation cases established a well-known landmark heralding the new emerging direction toward which our cultural norms and social structures are moving. The movement toward full citizenship is inevitable. The primary question facing American society then is not whether or not we move in this direction, but rather, the critical questions are with what speed and with what degree of willingness and orderliness. Many churches tolerate segregation, or have easily conformed to the racial and ethnic groupings in which the community has divided itself. "Who is my neighbor?" is a question the churches must ponder anew.

The Framework of Research. Recent research has cast overwhelming doubts on the effectiveness of exhortation, propaganda, as well as education which confines itself to transmitting information, as ways to change social behavior. These approaches were based on the assumption that prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behavior had a cause and effect relationship. The research indicates that prejudiced attitudes do not predetermine discriminatory behavior; and that an individual's discriminatory behavior may be determined more by the social situation at any given moment than by his pre-existing attitudes. In short, both attitudes and behavior are highly susceptible to situational changes.

The results of this research, which seem to have been validated by our nation's experience in desegregation, have shifted the focus among practitioners in the intergroup relations field from attempting to deal with prejudice and the prejudiced individual per se to the attempt to deal with discriminatory behavior whatever its cause and the social situation in which such behavior occurs.

Much of the current effort within the churches still seems to be based on the assumption that a change in intergroup relations can only come about as a result of change in the attitudes of individual holders of prejudicial social attitudes. As long as approaches based on this assumption remain dominant in the churches, there can be little hope for a significant change in the lives of our churches in the immediate future. They will remain basically not only segregated institutions, but also "segregating" institutions who give support to the patterns of discriminatory behavior which operate in the lives of their communities.

Earl Raab and Seymour M. Lipset, in "Prejudice and Society", a pamphlet issued by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in 1959, indicate the effect of organizational membership policies on a member's individual intergroup behavior as well as on the community's norms and social structure. They write that the membership policies of an organization aid in structuring the intergroup behavior of its members in that it is one of the social situations in which its members' social behavior is formed. Of course, the importance of this social situation in any given circumstance is dependent on the significance of this particular association to its members. They note that perhaps what is more significant is the effect of an organization's membership policy on the whole community,

stressing that a policy of membership exclusion is an open behavior cue for the whole community.

This point is illustrated by the following: "In July of 1951, a Negro bus driver and his family tried to move into a previously all-white neighborhood in a suburb of Chicago. A bloody three day riot ensued. The community leaders of Chicago were shocked by the hoodlums. But in the same month, one of the leading social clubs of the city, to which many of these community leaders belonged, refused to allow one of the world's outstanding scientists into its luncheon room because he was a Negro." The writers comment that this club and others like it had provided the cues which contributed to causing this suburban violence. "Indeed the combined membership and admission policies of community groups are a key element in any Prejudiced Community."

Conversely, they further note that a voluntary association intensifies its effect on a community when it places itself on public record as opposed to discriminatory practices, begins an internal educational program or participates actively in some community program in opposition to discriminatory practices. With regard to the larger effect on community practices, they say, "The impact on the community practices is often self-multiplying, as in the case of an organization which has become officially sensitive to the problem and refuses to hold its convention at a hotel which discriminates."

Learning from Experience. A degree of readiness is indicated by some recent studies. A report made in 1957 by the Department of Christian Social Relations of the Protestant Council of the City of New York asserted that half of the churches in that city have an interracial membership. Another report made in 1958 by the Social Welfare Department of the Cleveland Church Federation, based on a survey of the churches who cooperate with it, stated in its findings:

"The majority of the churches that cooperate with the Cleveland Church Federation are, and/or have been, inclusive of more than one racial group in their active fellowship! This includes two-thirds of the churches on the East Side of Cleveland and nearly half of the suburban churches."

One of the facts that emerged from the previously mentioned study of the Congregational Christian Churches was that in the opinion of ministers and lay leaders, well over half of the congregations studied, 63.4% of them, would support their pastors in implementing a policy of racial inclusion.

In addition, there are some facts which emerge from study of the churches' experience which are particularly important in relation to the idea of a public declaration that persons are welcome without regard to racial qualification. Studies indicate quite definitely that there will not be an overwhelming rush on the part of non-whites when a church publicly declares an open door policy. On the contrary, many ministers have indicated the need for a long process of education and action before non-whites availed themselves of the services and ministry of their churches.

On the other hand, one of the major studies of three major Protestant denominations indicated that when non-white persons took the initiative in going to a church of a white group, over 80% of these churches were publicly known to mean persons of all groups when they extended the invitation to worship either from the pulpit or the printed sign which read "All are Welcome". The study indicates the significance of this factor when it is taken together with the indication that one-half of the churches which become inclusive become so as the result of the initiative of the non-white person. It becomes clear that local church policy and leadership are critical factors in the acceptance of new participants of another racial group.

This same study reported that only twenty-six of the 237,476 members of the churches had severed their connection because members of non-white groups became members. The study noted that in contrast to this minimum loss of support, every appraisal reported that the net effect of the departure of the dissatisfied members was beneficial to the church in terms of spiritual insight, fellowship and human assets for the church.

Another kind of readiness is indicated by the National Student Christian Federation. In a report on "Students and Segregation — a Declaration of Christian Intention" at the II General Assembly, Summer 1960, they challenged the

churches throughout the country to open their membership to all sincere believers regardless of race.

Churches were urged "to determine, if they have not already done so, and to make it known, (even by paid advertisement in local newspapers if necessary) that their worship services are open for any, irrespective of race, who will come sincerely and devoutly to worship the God revealed in Jesus Christ."

They were also urged by the students to fix a date when they would accept applications for membership; to open to all other church activities such as Sunday Schools; and to make a stand for equal economic opportunity, racial freedom and justice for all peoples.

"We also believe", they declared, "that there has seldom been given to the Christian Churches in our country so obvious an obligation for the Gospel of Reconciliation."

Mission to the Inner-City. Almost every Protestant denomination has acknowledged that they have lost ground in terms of institutional strength in the inner cities of our great metropolitan areas; the gains in institutional strength in the last decade have come in suburbia. The reasons for this inability to mount an effective ministry in the inner city are many and complex. However, at the heart of any adequate strategy today must be a forthright declaration on the part of churches as to their willingness to serve all who come.

Any look at the population trends indicates that increasing numbers of non-whites have been and are moving into our central cities in large metropolitan areas, with corresponding movement of an almost all-white population to suburban areas. Increasingly, churchmen are taking cognizance of this.

In the January 29, 1961 issue of the *New York Times*, a report is carried of statements made last September by the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago to the archdiocesan clergy, urging them to intensify efforts to insure full integration of Negro Catholics into "the complete life of the church". The *Times* quoted him as saying, "We must remove from the church on the local scene any possible taint of racial discrimination or racial segregation and help provide the moral leadership for eliminating racial discrimination from the whole community".

Any kind of comprehensive strategy of missions demands that the local churches make themselves clear on their membership policies. Can the churches do less if they are to be faithful to their calling?

Conclusion

In the midst of current ecclesiastic affluence, many thoughtful church leaders have expressed concern about the need of the church to understand more fully its nature and mission as the body of Christ, as the community of the faithful. This process must emerge out of wrestling with this understanding as it relates to great social issues confronting it at the point of the churches' encounter with the world. Such an issue is the ability of local churches to serve people without regard to race.

If tomorrow every Christian church announced publicly that it was open to all worshippers without regard to race, this would still require work to make the announcement a reality. However, what would happen is a radical change of the image of the churches in the minds of non-whites in our country and in other lands and, perhaps most significantly, in the minds of persons participating in such actions.

Such policy statements are a logical first step in a massive desegregation process in freeing the churches from their social heritage of segregation and discriminatory practices. Perhaps, in many situations it would result in releasing the churches to witness more fully for justice to members of minority groups in important areas of community life such as employment, housing and public accommodations. Finally, it would allow the church to be more fully faithful to its nature and mission.

* * *

"Integration in Church Related Schools of the South"

"Integration in Church Related Schools of the South" was a report to the Atlanta Consultation of the Commission on Home Missions Institutions of the National Council of Churches, October 25, 1960, by Dr. Herman H. Long, Director of the Race Relations Department, Board of Home Missions, Congregational Christian Churches. The paper makes "an assessment of the status of developments toward integration in the church related colleges of the southern region" and at-

tempts "to discern some of the major problems which have emerged".

Dr. Long notes several central conclusions which seem to suggest themselves "on the basis of findings highlighted in the report":

"1. While a significant degree of desegregation has taken place within the private, church-related schools, the rate is far below that which obtains for state-supported institutions. These schools, instead of leading, seem to be following patterns which are established by their public counterparts. The latter institutions appear to be responding to legal and political forces more effectively than the private institutions or seem to respond to the moral and religious influences central to their church-relatedness.

"2. Little difference exists between the Negro and white schools as to the degree with which desegregation is being effected at the student level. At board and faculty levels, the Negro schools have a distinct advantage in the amount of interracial participation and representation, due in large measure to their missionary tradition and background and to the initial inclusive policies upon which they were founded.

"3. There appears to be a rather critical promotional lag in the actual desegregation of these institutions — both white and Negro. The problem may be more critical for the Negro schools inasmuch as few white students come on their own initiative and because of the fact that Negro schools have not enjoyed high prestige and status in the educational world. This lag appears to be primarily a lack of initiative and uncertainty of direction as to integration purpose as felt by the institutions from both their boards and church constituencies.

"4. Various fears and reservations exist on the part of those institutions which have not effected desegregation of student bodies. In the case of the institutions which have desegregated, however, no substantial problems emerged within the internal life of the campus. Nevertheless, at two points, these institutions appeared to face significant problems: (1) holding its constituency and winning the support of loyal dissenters within their trustee boards; and (2) difficulties in community relationships, and access to public accommodations for Negro students who become a part of the larger student body.

"In addition, some of the institutions felt that the absence of racial inclusiveness in the churches to which they were related constituted a hindrance to their own invitation toward desegregating.

"5. There was some indications of a problem of interpretation on the part of the Negro schools where its constituency and the larger public are concerned, as the image of itself and its basic purpose changes with actual desegregation.

"6. With all of the schools generally there appeared to be a lack of consensus and common understanding in regard to integration issues as between the faculty and students, as between students, faculty and boards, and as between the schools and the denominational constituencies. Very little evidence was reported which indicated that initiative was being taken to fill these gaps through some medium of student, faculty, board and denominational exchange of ideas.

"7. The student sit-in protest movement had a far-reaching impact upon the life of these schools. While the sit-ins have created disruptions in the regular academic affairs of the institutions, they have probably led to a broader identification by the students and schools with the moral issue of segregation. On the negative side, they have perhaps widened the already existing gap between the schools and their boards and constituencies."

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Recent Publications

The following are currently available from the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations of the National Council of Churches:

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF ALL LABOR RESOURCES WITHOUT REGARD TO RACE, COLOR, RELIGION, OR NATIONAL ORIGIN. A Resolution adopted by The General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., December 9, 1960. 10¢ each.

RELIGION AMONG ETHNIC AND RACIAL MINORITIES by J. Oscar Lee. Reprinted from *The Annals* of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, November 1960, 10¢ each.

RESOLUTION ON THE RIGHT TO VOTE. Adopted by the General Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., February 23, 1961, single copy free.

SPECIAL PACKETS OF SELECTED LITERATURE from various sources; \$1.00 each:

- (1) Racial Integration in the Churches
- (2) The Churches and Non-Segregated Housing
- (3) The Churches and Fair Employment Practices
- (4) The Churches and the Right to Vote
- (5) The Churches and School Desegregation
- (6) The Churches and the Sit-In Demonstrations

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Correction

The editors apologize for a printing error in the January-February 1961 issue of *INTERRACIAL NEWS SERVICE*. On the last page, the last lines in the first column, beginning with the line "and respect for all men as persons created in the image of God.", should appear in the second column, under *UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST*, following the line "For the furtherance of human rights throughout the world".

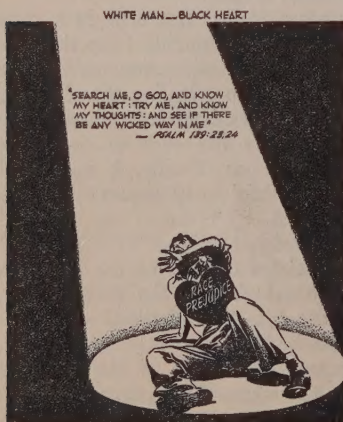
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Race Relations Institute

The 18th annual Race Relations Institute will be held at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, June 19 through July 1, 1961, with a special clinic on Religion and Race. For information, write Dr. J. Oscar Lee, Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, National Council of Churches.

The matter in these pages is presented for the reader's information. Unless so stated, it is not to be construed as reflecting the attitudes or positions of the Department of Racial and Cultural Relations or of The National Council of Churches.

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